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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the level of politeness of various forms of request made in English, as if spoken to an American, as perceived by college-level native speakers of English (n=80), Japanese speakers in the United States (n=34), and Japanese speakers in Japan (n=103). A semantic differential questionnaire measuring 10 levels of politeness was administered. The instrument consisted of three sections, namely: (1) ratings of requests that might be used in four situations; (2) ratings of frequency of use of request forms; and (3) demographic information, including language background. In the request situations used, relative status of the addressee is high in two situations, low in a third, and equal in the fourth. Familiarity was low and request magnitude small in all situations. Analysis of responses found support for almost all hypotheses concerning relative politeness of request forms, including the use of interrogatives, declaratives, imperatives with and without tag questions, tense, use of modals, positively and negatively worded requests, requests with tags, and negative politeness. No significant differences in perceptions were found between Americans and Japanese, but the Japanese in the United States perceived the requests as more polite than the other Japanese. The questionnaire is appended. (MSE)

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# A Study of Japanese and American Perceptions of Politeness in Requests

Kenji Kitao

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hearer is not great. Accordingly, this analysis suggests that politeness strategies are a useful tool for the measurement of relationships between the speaker and the hearer in terms of the speaker's attitude toward the hearer.

Although research into discourse analysis is a vast field, the investigator hopes that this paper will make a useful contribution for the analysis of topic organization and politeness strategies.

# A Study of Japanese and American Perceptions of Politeness in Requests

Kenji Kitao

## Introduction

As an increasing number of Japanese people visit the United States for a variety of purposes, the Japanese are encountering Americans in everyday settings where communication is necessary. Their problems in communicating in English thus become significant as an area of research.

Politeness is one area of communicative competence in which Japanese people have problems (Saito, 1985). Politeness in requests is a particularly important issue (Tracy et al., 1984), because requests, by definition, impose on the hearer (H), and if the speaker (S) does not make a request appropriately, the desired goal may not be reached, H may be embarrassed, or the relationship may be damaged. For foreign language speakers, it is particularly difficult to judge and use politeness.

In this paper, I will discuss requests and politeness strategies, propose hypotheses, and discuss the results of a study on perceptions of politeness.

## Review of Literature

### Requests

When making a request, S is asking H to do something. H is

imposed upon, and S usually profits. The larger the request, the greater the imposition on H. If S asks to borrow $50, the imposition is greater than if S asks to borrow $10. The imposition as it is determined by the size of the request is called *absolute imposition*. If S's imposition is too great, H may reject the request, and S will not achieve the goal and may be embarrassed.

However, in actual situations, H perceives a request in terms of *relative imposition*, which is affected by various factors, including social distance (familiarity) and social status (power) (Scollon & Scollon, 1983). If familiarity is high, relative imposition is smaller than if familiarity is low. If S has more power than H, the relative imposition is smaller. Additionally, there are several situational variables, including necessity of the request, ease of carrying out the request, and cultural differences (Brown and Levinson, 1978). Therefore, the size of a request (absolute imposition) is mediated by relational distance between S and H (familiarity and power) and situational variables and becomes the relative imposition which H experiences. (See Kitao [1989] for a more detailed discussion.)

**Politeness**

Politeness is a strategy used to maintain and develop relationships. Since requests are discourteous by nature, politeness is important (Leech, 1983). Politeness in requests is a communication strategy S uses to achieve goals and, in a continuing relationship, to help preserve the relationship. S chooses the level of politeness according to a perception of how large H will consider the relative imposition.

According to Brown and Levinson (1978) politeness is maintaining

H's face, that is, wants, and Brown and Levinson identify two types of wants: ego-preserving wants and public-self preserving wants, the desire to be viewed as a contributing member of society. The former generates negative face, and the latter, positive face.

S uses politeness not only to decrease relative imposition but also to increase approval for achieving the goal. When S gives H options or makes the request indirectly, the request is more polite, because H has more freedom of choice. If the request is more polite, imposition is decreased, which helps maintain a good relationship. However, that increases the possibility that the request will be rejected, so that S does not achieve the goal.

Brown and Levinson (1978) differentiate between positive and negative politeness. Positive politeness is directed toward S's need for approval and belonging and espresses solidarity. Using in-group markers, being optimistic, indicating common ground, and offering or promising are all positive politeness strategies. Negative politeness functions to minimize the imposition. Being conventionally indirect, questioning, hedging, being pessimistic, minimizing the imposition, giving deference, and apologizing are all negative politeness strategies. Both negative and positive politeness increase as the size of the request increases. Negative politeness increases when S is less powerful or familiarity is low.

S uses linguistic forms, nonverbal cues, and communicative functions to express politeness. According to Fraser (1978), H perceives imposition based on relative imposition mitigated by politeness. If relative imposition is larger, greater politeness is necessary.

**Differences of Politeness in English and Japanese**

In Japan, differences in social status and power are clearer and more important than in the US. The Japanese language supports this system, and *keigo*, special polite language, is used to show respect when speaking to superiors or people outside of one's own group (Horikawa & Hayashi, 1969). While the use of *keigo* is similar to polite language in English, there are differences in degrees and complexity of the relationships and in interpreting those relationships. The Japanese acknowledge superiority more clearly and use negative politeness more than Americans. For Americans, it is polite to include other people in one's own group by use of informal language. However, for the Japanese, it is more polite to keep others outside of the group. Americans use positive politeness more than the Japanese do, and the Japanese usually use negative politeness to people outside their groups.

Japanese has many examples of negative and positive politeness. A Japanese will apologize to maintain a good relationship, even when he/she is not wrong (negative politeness). If a Japanese disagrees or criticizes, he/she does so very indirectly (negative politeness). If an issue is minor, a Japanese usually agrees even if they want to disagree (positive politeness) (Naotsuka, 1981).

**Previous Studies of Politeness**

Several studies have been conducted to determine the level of politeness of different types of requests in English.

Fraser (1978) had college students rank sentences in order of descending deference. Sentences were varied according to use of *can* or *could*, positiveness or negativeness, and use of either interrogative

or imperative-plus-tag form. Nearly all subjects used this order:

1. Could you do that
2. Can you do that
3. Do that, could you
4. Do that, can you
5. Couldn't you do that
6. Can't you do that
7. Do that, couldn't you
8. Do that, can't you

In a second study, Fraser had another group of 40 college students rank pairs of sentences according to their deference. The results, in order of decreasing deference, were as follows:

1. Would you do that
2. I would like you to do that
3. You might do that
4. I must ask you to do that
5. Can you do that
6. Will you do that
7. Why not do that
8. Do you have to do that
9. I request that you do that
10. Do that

Fraser concluded that native speakers have a clear sense of which of any pair of requests shows the most deference. The results of the first study indicate that sentences with modals are more polite than those without them, that positive sentences are more polite than negative ones, that interrogatives are more polite than imperative-plus-tag

forms, and that past tense is more polite than present tense.

The second study indicates that sentences with "would," "might," "must," or "can" are more polite than sentences without them. Second person is more polite than first. Past tense is more polite than present. Interrogatives are more polite than declaratives or imperatives. It also appears that uncommon requests may be perceived as having ambiguous politeness levels.

Carrell and Konneker (1981) compared politeness judgments of native and nonnative English speakers on a set of request forms varied in their syntactic/semantic properties, using different mood (interrogative, declarative, and imperative), tense (past and present), and modal (present or absent).

The participants ranked the request forms as follows:

1. interrogative—past tense modal
2. interrogative—present tense modal
3. interrogative—no modal
4. declarative—past tense modal
5. declarative—present tense modal
6. declarative—no modal
7. imperative
8. imperative—elliptical

Results indicated that grammatical mood makes the greatest contribution to politeness, with interrogative being most polite, declarative mood next most polite, and imperative least polite. Presence of modals contributes next most to politeness; modals don't add much to the already-very-polite interrogatives, but they contribute to the not-as-polite declarative. A past tense modal adds a small additional degree

of politeness.

There was a high correlation between the native and nonnative judgments of politeness. Native and nonnative speakers identified the same order of relative politeness. Few differences were found across nationalities or levels of English. One major difference is that the ESL learners tended to make more distinctions than did native English speakers for forms that are different in syntax but not in semantics.

Interestingly, nonnative speakers seem more sensitive to politeness. This sensitivity to grammar and other aspects of language may actually hinder nonnative speakers' mastery of English, if they become overly sensitive.

Tanaka & Kawabe (1982) conducted a study using ten Americans and ten advanced Japanese ESL students. Subjects were instructed to place twelve requests in order of politeness. High correlations in perception of politeness were found among subjects in each group, but, again, the Japanese participants tended to be oversensitive to politeness distinctions.

Tanaka & Kawabe also reported a study on the use of politeness strategies for six requests at ten psychological and social distances. They found that native speakers used more polite strategies in distant relationships and less polite strategies in close relationships. Advanced ESL learners tended to use similar but somewhat less polite strategies.

Iwata and Fukushima (1986) conducted a study with 39 Japanese sophomores in Japan on whether they would choose positive or negative politeness in seven different situations between professors and students in which positive politeness would be appropriate. The results showed that only in 40.65% of the cases did participants chose positive po-

liteness for the right reasons. The researchers concluded that Japanese students have problems with positive politeness. It appears that Japanese choose negative politeness even when they could use positive politeness, because they believe that negative politeness is more appropriate to use between a professor and students.

Iwata and Fukushima (1987) had Japanese speakers and English speakers fill out a pencil-and-paper questionnaire in their native languages which they made requests in different situations. They found that English and Japanese speakers employed similar strategies, including providing reasons for the request, minimizing the cost to S and maximizing the benefit to S. However, they found that Japanese participants distinguished more clearly based on familiarity.

**Hypotheses**

Based on this discussion of politeness in English and Japanese and on the previous studies that I have cited, I would like to propose the following hypotheses.

$H_1$: The higher the hearer's power in relation to the speaker, the higher the level of politeness used.

$H_2$: Interrogative forms are more polite than declarative forms.

$H_3$: Declarative forms are more polite than imperative forms.

$H_4$: Interrogative forms are more polite than imperative forms.

$H_5$: Interrogative requests are more polite than imperative requests with a tag question.

$H_6$: Declarative requests are more polite than imperative requests with a tag question.

$H_7$: Imperative requests with a tag question are more polite than imperative requests.

$H_8$: Past tense requests are more polite than future tense requests.

$H_9$: Past tense requests are more polite than present tense requests.

$H_{10}$: Future tense requests are more polite than present tense requests.

$H_{11}$: Requests with a modal are more polite than requests without one.

$H_{12}$: Positively worded requests are more polite than negatively worded requests.

$H_{13}$: Requests with "please" are more polite than requests without it.

$H_{14}$: Requests with "sir" are more polite than requests without it.

$H_{15}$: Requests with the title and family name are more polite than requests without them.

$H_{16}$: The Japanese perceive negative politeness less polite than Americans.

$H_{17}$: Uncommonly used requests show a wider dispersion than commonly used requests.

$H_{18}$: The Japanese use less polite strategies than Americans do.

## Methods

### Overview

The purpose of this study is to investigate politeness levels of various forms of requests in English as perceived by native speakers of English, Japanese speakers in the United States, and Japanese speakers in Japan, using a semantic differential questionnaire.

### Participants

The American participants were 80 students at a large Midwestern

university, given extra credit for filling out the questionnaire during the class period. The Japanese participants in the United States (Japanese in US) were 34 graduate and undergraduate students at the same university who had scored 550 or above on the *Test of English as a Foreign Language* (TOEFL) or the equivalent on other examinations. They participated in the study voluntarily at their convenience. Japanese participants in Japan (Japanese) were 103 seniors majoring in French or Spanish at a small college in Kyoto. They filled out the questionnaire in class as a class requirement.

**Design**

This is a paper and pencil measure of perception of politeness in requests, using 10 levels (0–9) on a semantic differential. The same questionnaire was administered to Americans and Japanese in US (See Apendix A). No. 117 was changed for Japanese (See Appendix B), and questions about frequency of different requests (Nos. 62–107) were eliminated because of their little exposure in English (see Stimulus Material).

**Stimulus Material**

The Questionnaire on Politeness was used to measure how participants perceived levels of politeness of requests in English directed at an American. It consists of three sections: ratings of requests in English (Nos. 1–61), ratings of frequency of use of request forms (Nos. 62–107) and demographic information (Nos. 108–117). Relative status of the addressee is high in Situations I & II (Nos. 1–16; Nos. 17–28), low in Situation III (Nos. 29–45) and equal in Situation IV (Nos.

46–61). Familiarity was low and request size small in all four situations.

Requests in interrogative, declarative, and imperative forms with past, present and future tense and with or without modals were included. Both positively and negatively worded requests were used. Most commonly used request forms were included.

In the second section (Nos. 62–107), participants were asked to rate the frequency of use of all the requests included in the first section.

The third section (Nos. 108–117) covered demographic information. Questions 112–117 were concerned with participants' history of studying English and exposure to English.

**Measurement**

In the first section (politeness of requests), the higher the rating, the more polite the request was perceived to be. In the second section (frequency of requests), the higher the rating, the more frequently a request was perceived to be used.

**Analyses**

Demographic data was analyzed and the three groups were compared according to their ages, academic status (graduate vs. undergraduate), and so on. The two Japanese groups were also compared on the length of time spent studying English, the length of time spent in the United States, and the amount of exposure to English. Perceptions of politeness were compared between and within groups, using t-tests. Perceptions of frequency of the requests were also compared between groups, using t-tests. In addition, exploratory factor analysis was used

on the ratings of politeness for each situation on each group. Requests were ranked within each situation, and ratings compared using t-tests. Last, hypotheses related to the forms of the requests were tested by comparing ratings of forms across situations, also using t-tests.

## Results and Discussion

The results of this study can be found in Kitao, Munsell, Kitao, Yoshida, and Yoshida (1987).

### Demographic Data

We found no significant differences in perception of politeness of requests by either sex or age for Japanese and Americans. As for Japanese in US, male participants perceived requests as being more polite than female participants did. This might be due to their longer exposure to English. Also, as Table 3 shows, Japanese in US perceived requests as being more polite than did Japanese or Americans. Thus, for nonnative English speakers, exposure to English may be a factor in determining perceptions of politeness. The more exposure nonnative speakers have to English, the more polite they tend to perceive requests as being. Also, for Japanese, there were no significant differences by status (graduate or undergraduate) or background of studying English.

### Major Findings

The major findings of this study, in terms of the hypotheses, are summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Summary of major findings

| Hypothesis | fully supported | partially supported | not supported |
|---|---|---|---|
| $H_1$: The higher the hearer's power in relation to the speaker, the higher the level of politeness used. | A | Ju | J |
| $H_2$: Interrogative forms are more polite than declarative forms. | | A Ju J | |
| $H_3$: Declarative forms are more polite than imperative forms. | Ju J | A | |
| $H_4$: Interrogative forms are more polite than imperative forms. | | A Ju J | |
| $H_5$: Interrogative requests are more polite than imperative requests with a tag question. | A Ju J | | |
| $H_6$: Declarative requests are more polite than imperative requests with a tag question. | A Ju J | | |
| $H_7$: Imperative requests with a tag question are more polite than imperative requests. | A Ju J | | |
| $H_8$: Past tense requests are more polite than future tense requests. | Ju J | A | |
| $H_9$: Past tense requests are more polite than present tense requests. | Ju J | A | |
| $H_{10}$: Future tense requests are more polite than present tense requests. | J | | A Ju |
| $H_{11}$: Requests with a modal are more polite than requests without one. | Ju J | A | |
| $H_{12}$: Positively worded requests are more polite than negatively worded requests. | A | Ju | J |
| $H_{13}$: Requests with "please" are more polite than requests without it. | A Ju J | | |
| $H_{14}$: Requests with "sir" are more polite than requests without it. | A Ju J | | |
| $H_{15}$: Requests with the title and family name are more polite than requests without them. | A Ju J | | |
| $H_{16}$: The Japanese perceive negative politeness less polite than Americans. | A Ju J | | |
| $H_{17}$: Uncommonly used requests show a wider dispersion than commonly used requests. | Ju | | A |
| $H_{18}$: The Japanese use less polite strategies than Americans do. | | | A Ju J |

A=Americans; Ju=Japanese in US; J=Japanese in Japan

$H_1$: The higher the hearer's power in relation to the speaker, the higher the level of politeness used.

The responses of Japanese in US supported this hypothesis. For Americans, there were basement effects, but their responses also tended to support the hypothesis. The data from Japanese did not support this hypothesis, possibly because their perceptions of politeness have not stabilized.

$H_2$: Interrogative forms are more polite than declarative forms.

This hypothesis was supported, except with examples of negative politeness, which, though they were declarative forms, had high politeness ratings.

$H_3$: Declarative forms are more polite than imperative forms.

While all groups at least partially support this, the inclusion of "please" also affected respondents' perceptions of politeness. Ratings of Americans and Japanese in US were considerably increased by the tag "please." Ratings of Japanese were less influenced by this tag.

$H_4$: Interrogative forms are more polite than imperative forms.

Interrogative forms were generally perceived by all three groups as being more polite than imperative forms, with the exception of "Why don't you..." and "How about..." in comparison with imperatives with "please."

$H_5$: Interrogative requests are more polite than imperative requests with a tag question.

This hypothesis, with a few exceptions, was supported by all three groups.

$H_6$: Declarative requests are more polite than imperative requests with a tag question.

This hypothesis, with a few exceptions, was supported by all three

groups.

$H_7$: Imperative requests with a tag question are more polite than imperative requests.

All three groups tended to support this hypothesis.

$H_8$: Past tense requests are more polite than future tense requests.

All three groups tended to support this hypothesis for declarative and interrogative form requests. Americans, however, did not perceive past tense imperatives with a tag question as being more polite than future tense imperatives with a tag question.

$H_9$: Past tense requests are more polite than present tense requests.

Both Japanese groups supported this hypothesis. Americans supported it for declarative and imperative forms.

$H_{10}$: Future tense requests are more polite than present tense requests.

Only Japanese in Japan supported this hypothesis. For the most part, Japanese in US and Americans perceived no differences or perceived present tense requests as being more polite.

$H_{11}$: Requests with a modal are more polite than requests without one.

Japanese and Japanese in US both tended to perceive requests with modals as being more polite than requests without them. Americans perceived them the same way, except requests that used "please" but no modal.

$H_{12}$: Positively worded requests are more polite than negatively worded requests.

This hypothesis was supported by Americans and partially supported by Japanese in US. Japanese did not support it, due either to interference from Japanese rules of politeness or the fact that they are

taught this in English classes in Japan.

$H_{13}$: Requests with "please" are more polite than requests without it.

All three groups supported this hypothesis.

$H_{14}$: Requests with "sir" are more polite than requests without it.

All three groups supported this hypothesis.

$H_{15}$: Requests with the title and family name are more polite than requests without them.

All three groups supported this hypothesis.

$H_{16}$: The Japanese perceive negative politeness less polite than Americans.

All three groups supported this hypothesis.

$H_{17}$: Uncommonly used requests show a wider dispersion than commonly used requests.

This hypothesis was only tested for Americans and Japanese in US. It was supported by Japanese in US but not by Americans. Presumably, Americans have developed a sense of the level of politeness of even fairly rare requests.

$H_{18}$: The Japanese use less polite strategies than Americans do.

This hypothesis was contradicted by the results. Since the Japanese groups rated the least polite requests as being less polite than Americans did, they would presumably be less likely to use them.

**Situations and Politeness**

The data allow some ambiguity. However, we can assume that all three groups understood that Situations I & II (requests made to a professor by a student) require more polite forms than Situations III & IV (a request made to a twelve year old newspaper boy and one

made to a waiter of the same age as the speaker). Japanese made the strongest distinctions and rated imperative form requests as having the lowest level of politeness in Situations I & II. (This should be expected, since a professor is a person with whom the Japanese use the highest level of politeness.) This tends to contradict $H_{18}$, since presumably the Japanese would not use these impolite forms in these situations. However, it is difficult to judge what a speaker would use in actual communication based on ratings of politeness.

No groups perceived that Situation IV required more polite requests than Situation III, and as a matter of fact, for "Would you...," they perceived that Situation III required more polite requests. It is possible that the manipulated difference between status was not effective, and the participants did not make a strong distinction between the politeness required when speaking to a younger newspaper boy and a waiter of the same age as the speaker.

**Interrogatives**

All three groups perceived interrogatives as being more polite than declaratives, except in the cases of the two examples of negative politeness: "I wonder if..." (42) and "I would appreciate it if..." (43). However, Japanese perceived "I would like to..." (51) as being more polite than interrogatives. For Japanese in US, there was no significant difference, though Americans perceived it as being less polite than interrogatives. Japanese also perceived "I would like you to..." (33) as being more polite than interrogatives, though the differences were insignificant for the other two groups. Japanese people have probably been taught in their English classes that "I would like..."

is very polite. Of the interrogatives, all three groups perceived "Why don't you..." (40) and "How about..." (60) as being impolite. To Japanese people, these sound very casual and informal and therefore impolite. Also, these are perhaps more like suggestions used as requests, and they may not sound polite as requests.

All three groups perceived interrogatives as being more polite than imperatives or imperatives with tag questions, except that Americans perceived an imperative with "please" (41) as being more polite than interrogative forms.

Americans and Japanese in US perceived "May I..." as being more polite than Japanese did. This is probably because Japanese students are taught to use this form to obtain permission, but its politeness level is not dealt with. Japanese in US have come to have a sense of the politeness level through their exposure to English in the US.

**Declaratives**

All three groups perceived declarative forms of requests as being more polite than imperative forms. However, only Americans perceived imperative forms with "please" as being more polite than declaratives.

All three groups perceived declarative forms of requests as being more polite than imperative forms with tag questions. Japanese perceived imperative forms with tag questions as being least polite. This is the biggest difference among the three groups. This is probably because in Japanese, speakers do not use imperative forms with tag questions and so Japanese speakers are not used to them.

**Imperatives with Tag Questions**

All three groups perceived imperative forms with tag questions as

being less polite than interrogative form requests. Americans and Japanese in US perceived positively worded forms as being more polite than negatively worded forms. They also perceived past tense forms as being more polite than present tense forms. Japanese, however, did the opposite.

**Imperatives**

All three groups perceived imperatives as being least polite across the four situations. The two Japanese groups perceived imperatives as being particularly impolite. Americans perceived imperatives with "please" as being more polite than declarative forms. Americans perceived imperatives as being more polite than the Japanese did. Japanese never perceived the imperative more polite than declarative forms. For the Japanese, whether "please" is attached or not, imperative forms always appear rude. Japanese people use imperatives when they order or command. People of lower status do not use them when speaking to people of higher status in Japan. However, in the United States, people often use imperative form requests with "please" in daily life, even to people of higher status, and they are perceived sufficiently polite in most of the situations.

**Tense**

For declarative and interrogative form requests, all three groups tended to perceive past tense as being more polite than future tense. However, as for imperative forms with tag questions, there was no significant difference for Americans. We obtained the same results for past tense and present tense. In spite of this, surprisingly, factor

analysis indicated that requests were differentiated according to modal, not tense.

Since we had few examples of future tense and present tense comparisons, and because they were not parallel, it is difficult to draw definite conclusions. However, Japanese rated "Will you..." as being more polite than the other two groups did. This is probably because they were taught in their English classes that this form was polite.

**Requests with Modals**

All three groups perceived requests with modals as being more polite than requests without them, except cases of requests with "please." Modals are important factors in perception of the level of politeness. For the two Japanese groups, they are more important than tense, mood, and negativeness or positiveness, as indicated by the factor analysis. Thus modals have a direct effect on politeness levels. Mood also seems to have an important influence on politeness for all three groups, though it is somewhat less clear. Interestingly, the factor analysis does not indicate that tense is an important factor in determining level of politeness.

**Positively and Negatively Worded Requests**

Americans and Japanese in US perceived positively worded requests as being more polite than negatively worded requests. Americans perceived positively worded tag questions as being more polite than negatively worded tag questions, but the two Japanese groups did not perceive any significant differences. As a matter of fact, Japanese perceived the opposite in three cases.

Japanese people tend to perceive negatively worded requests as being more polite than Americans do. This is probably because negatively worded requests are more polite in Japanese (Minami, 1987), and some English teachers teach that negatively worded requests are also more polite than positively worded requests in English. Negative questions in Japanese are more indirect and therefore more polite, but in English, negative questions only indicate anticipation of a negative answer and have nothing to do with indirectness, so that they do not increase politeness at all.

**Requests with Tags**

All three groups perceived imperative forms with "please," "sir," or the title and family name as being more polite than imperative forms without a tag.

Americans and Japanese in US perceived imperatives with "please" as being more polite than other imperatives with or without a tag, but Japanese did not. In Japanese, even if "please" is used, use of an imperative involves a great deal of imposition. Imperatives are used by people of high status when speaking to people of lower status or in certain routine situations. Japanese in US seem to have learned that "please" adds much politeness in requests.

Americans perceived requests with "sir," a title and name, and "possibly" as occurring more frequently than the Japanese groups did. On the other hand, the Japanese groups perceived tag questions with "could" and "couldn't" and elliptical imperative forms as being more frequent than Americans did. This indicates that the Japanese are not familiar with certain expressions even after they have spent time

in the United States. However, they are familiar with tag questions, since these are emphasized in their English classes. Also, the Japanese tend to perceive less polite requests as being more frequent. This may be because they can remember simple, impolite requests better than more complicated, polite requests.

**Negative Politeness**

Americans and Japanese in US perceived negative politeness as being more polite than Japanese did. One possible explanation is that the Japanese are more accustomed to negative politeness in Japanese than Americans are in English, so they do not perceive it as being unusually polite. Possibly, Japanese in US have had much exposure to English and may have become unaccustomed to negative politeness. Negative politeness is used very rarely and only in limited situations in the United States, and it is too polite to use it with a younger newspaper boy or a waiter of the same age in the United States. Thus Americans perceived it as being too polite.

Another possible explanation is that Japanese are not aware of the significance of the examples of negative politeness, although they seem to sense that these are very polite. This explanation is supported by the fact that, after administering the survey, one of the teachers discussed some of the forms with the students. From Nos. 39, 42, 43, 44, 58, and 59, students only understood 58 and recognized its significance.

However, Japanese perceived "Would you mind..." and "Do you mind..." as being more polite or no different from what Americans did. This is probably because Japanese students are taught in their English classes that these forms are very polite.

**Frequency of Use of Requests**

Americans and Japanese participants perceived the frequency of use of request forms very similarly. The correlations between the means of frequency and standard deviations of politeness were negative for both Americans and Japanese in US, but only the latter case is significant. This indicates that Japanese in US do not have a clear sense of the politeness of requests that they perceive as being less frequent.

There are at least two possible explanations for this. Japanese in US, with relatively less exposure to English than Americans, may not have a chance to develop a sense of the politeness of forms that they hear less frequently. Americans, with their greater exposure to English, develop a sense of the politeness of even less common forms. A second possible explanation is that Americans recognize the levels of politeness of requests that they have rarely heard through various cues in the form of the request. Since the Japanese did not know these cues, they are less able to judge the politeness of forms that they have heard less often.

Americans perceived imperative and "sir" and imperative and the title and family name to be more frequently used than Japanese in US did. This is probably because Japanese people never use imperatives to people of higher status, and an imperative with an expression of respect seems to be a contradiction. The results were the same for forms with "You might...." This is used to give permission, and the Japanese do not use such expressions when speaking to people of higher status. Thus, Americans perceived this request with "sir" or the title and name as more frequently used. "Can you possibly..." and

"Could you possibly..." are seldom taught in Japan, and Japanese students probably seldom have chances to hear them from their American friends. Japanese in US perceived elliptical imperatives as being more frequently used than Americans did. Japanese in US also perceived "Couldn't you..." and "...could you" as being more frequent. The Japanese tend to use negative questions for polite requests, and that may be why they thought these forms are frequent.

**Comparisons among Three Groups**

There were no significant differences in perceptions of politeness in requests between Americans and the two Japanese groups, but Japanese in US perceived requests as being more polite than Japanese did. Mean scores of perception of politeness were very high among three groups. They were most highly correlated between Japanese in US and Japanese, and then between Americans and Japanese in US. Correlations between ratings of Americans and Japanese were least highly correlated. This means that the three groups have similar perceptions of politeness but exposure to English makes some difference, and Japanese in US are somewhere between Americans and Japanese.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

There is still much research to do in the area of politeness in English and how nonnative English speakers perceive and use politeness in English.

Many similarities were found among the politeness ratings of the three groups. This study suggests a number of alternative hypotheses.

They include:

1. The results might by explained in terms of "discourse universals" of politeness, to which both the Japanese and Americans are sensitive.
2. Japanese and English overlap and similarities and differences in their responses can be explained by contrastive analysis.
3. There are a few trivial external markers (such as the length of the item or certain words or combinations of words) that cue the responses.
4. The results can be explained in terms of pedagogical effects, i.e., what Japanese students have been taught about politeness in English.

We cannot distinguish among these alternative hypotheses, based on the results of this study. Further study might help distinguish among these explanations and clarify explanations for similarities and differences among the ways that Americans and the Japanese perceive the politeness of requests.

In addition, there are a number of other potentially interesting areas of study related to politeness.

While this study looks at perceptions of degrees of politeness and perceptions of frequency, future studies need to look at perceptions of the required politeness in different situations and perceptions of the appropriateness of different forms in various situations. Another potentially fruitful area of research is that of production. Most previous studies have only looked at nonnative speakers' perceptions of politeness, not their ability to use politeness appropriately in actual situations. Fukushima and Iwata (1985) and Tanaka (1988) did

studies in which they elicited requests or invitations directed at teachers and other students in role play situations. Fukushima and Iwata concluded that Japanese speakers did not use polite expressions very effectively and did not distinguish between politeness levels when speaking to friends and those used when speaking to a teacher. They attributed this to a lack of control over English expressions. Tanaka found that Japanese learners of English, in comparison with Australians, overused negative politeness and underused positive politeness, but did not use negative politeness in situations where native speakers did. She also found that they did not vary politeness expressions as much as the native speakers did. Though these studies involved only a small number of participants, they found problems that recognition studies did not find. They indicate an important future direction for research.

Another important area of research interest would be the effects of different teaching techniques on improvements in students' skill in using politeness appropriately. These and other areas of politeness research are important to teachers of English and should be pursued by researchers.

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## Appendix A

*Questionnaire on Politeness*

This is a questionnaire to find out how you perceive the politeness level of requests. Please use your intuition and answer the following. Please mark your answers on the computer answer sheet.

You attend the first class. The classroom is very hot. The professor is standing near the window. You want to request him to open it.

Please rate the politeness level of the following statements from 0 (very rude) to 9 (very polite)

| | very rude | | | | | | | | | very polite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Could you open the window? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 2. Couldn't you open the window? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 3. Can you open the window? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 4. Can't you open the window? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 5. Open the window, could you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 6. Open the window, couldn't you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 7. Open the window, can you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 8. Open the window, can't you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 9. Would you open the window? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 10. Open the window, would you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 11. Open the window, wouldn't you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 12. Will you open the window? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 13. Open the window, will you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 14. Won't you open the window? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 15. Open the window, won't you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 16. Open the window. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

You attend the first class of a new course. You cannot hear the professor well. You want to request him to speak louder.

Please rate the politeness level of the following statements from 0 (very rude) to 9 (very polite)

| | very rude | | | | | | | | | very polite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 17. Speak louder, please. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 18. Speak louder, sir. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 19. Speak louder, Professor Smith. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 20. Speak louder. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 21. Would you speak louder, please? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 22. Would you speak louder, sir? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 23. Would you speak louder, Professor Smith? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 24. Would you speak louder? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 25. You might speak louder, please. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 26. You might speak louder, sir. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 27. You might speak louder, Professor Smith. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 28. You might speak louder. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

You have had a newspaper delivered for a month, but you have decided to discontinue it. When the newspaper boy, who is about 12 years old comes to collect money, you request him to stop your subscription.

Please rate the politeness level of the following statements from 0 (very rude) to 9 (very polite).

| | very rude | | | | | | | | | very polite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 29. Will you stop the newspaper? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 30. Can you stop the newspaper? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 31. I request that you stop the newspaper. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 32. I want you to stop the newspaper. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 33. I would like you to stop the newspaper. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 34. Stop the newspaper. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 35. Would you stop the newspaper? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

36. May I stop the newspaper? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
37. You might stop the newspaper. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
38. Stop the newspaper, will you? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
39. Can you possibly stop the newspaper? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
40. Why don't you stop the newspaper? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
41. Stop the newspaper, please. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
42. I wonder if you could stop the newspaper. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
43. I would appreciate it if you could stop the newspaper. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
44. Could you possibly stop the newspaper? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
45. Stop the newspaper, can you? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

You are in a restaurant, and a waiter of about your age is waiting on you. You want to get a glass of water.

Please rate the politeness level of the following statements from 0 (very rude) to 9 (very polite).

| | very rude | | | | | | | | very polite |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 46. Bring me a glass of water. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 47. Could you bring me a glass of water? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 48. Can you bring me a glass of water? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 49. I want a glass of water. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 50. Can I have a glass of water? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 51. I would like to have a glass of water. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 52. I will have a glass of water. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 53. A glass of water, please. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 54. Bring me a glass of water, please. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 55. I want a glass of water, please. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 56. May I have a glass of water? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 57. Would you bring me a glass of water? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 58. Would you mind bringing me a glass of water? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 59. Do you mind bringing me a glass of water? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 60. How about bringing me a glass of water? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |
| 61. A glass of water. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 9 |

How often do you hear the following request forms? Please rate 0 (very rarely) to 9 (very frequently). (Any request could be substituted for the portion of sentences in parentheses.)

| | very rarely | | | | | | | | | very frequently |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 62. Could you (open the window)? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 63. Couldn't you (open the window)? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 64. Can you (open the window)? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 65. Can't you (open the window)? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 66. (Open the window), could you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 67. (Open the window), couldn't you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 68. (Open the window), can you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 69. (Open the window), can't you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 70. Would you (open the window)? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 71. (Open the window), would you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 72. Will you (open the window)? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 73. (Open the window), will you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 74. Won't you (open the window)? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 75. (Open the window), won't you? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 76. (Speak louder), please. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 77. (Speak louder), sir. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 78. (Speak louder), (Professor) (Smith). | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 79. (Speak louder). | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 80. Would you (speak louder), please? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 81. Would you (speak louder), sir? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 82. Would you (speak louder), (Professor) (Smith)? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 83. Would you speak louder? | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 84. You might (speak louder), please. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 85. You might (speak louder), sir. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 86. You might (speak louder), (Professor) (Smith). | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 87. You might (speak louder). | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 88. I request that (you stop the newspaper). | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 89. I want you to (stop the newspaper). | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| 90. I would like you to (stop the newspaper). | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

91. May I (stop the newspaper)? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
92. Can you possibly (stop the newspaper)? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
93. Why don't you (stop the newspaper)? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
94. I wonder if you could (stop the newspaper). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
95. I would appreciate it if you could (stop the newspaper). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
96. Could you possibly (stop the newspaper?) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
97. I want (a glass of water). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
98. Can I have (a glass of water)? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
99. I would like to have (a glass of water). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
100. I will have (a glass of water). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
101. (A glass of water), please. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
102. I want (a glass of water), please. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
103. May I have (a glass of water)? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
104. Would you mind (bringing me a glass of water)? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
105. How about bringing me a glass of water? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
106. Do you mind bringing me a glass of water? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
107. (A glass of water). 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
108. Are you a: 0 female, 1 male?
109. Are you a: 0 graduate, 1 undergraduate: student?
110. your age:

0 less than 20 1 20–21 2 22–23 3 24–25 4 26–27
5 28–29 6 30–31 7 32–33 8 34–35 9 over 35

111. Are you a native speaker of English? Yes 0 No 1

*only for NON-native speakers of English:*

112. How long did you study English in your country?

0 less than 7 years
1 7 years
2 8 years
3 9 years
4 10 years
5 11 years
6 12 years
7 13 years
8 14 years
9 longer than 14 years

113. How long have you studied English in the United States?

0 less than 6 months
1 6–12 months
2 less than 1.5 years
3 less than 2 years
4 less than 2.5 years
5 less than 3 years
6 less than 3.5 years
7 less than 4 years
8 less than 4.5 years
9 longer than 4.5 years

114. How long have you lived in the United States?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | less than 6 months | 5 | less than 3 years |
| 1 | 6–12 months | 6 | less than 3.5 years |
| 2 | less than 1.5 years | 7 | less than 4 years |
| 3 | less than 2 years | 8 | less than 4.5 years |
| 4 | less than 2.5 years | 9 | longer than 4.5 years |

115. Outside of class, how many Americans do you converse with, on average, every day?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 (people) 9 (more than 8 people)

116. How long do you spend conversing with them in an average day?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0–15 minutes | 5 | hour and 16 min to 1.5 hours |
| 1 | 16–30 minutes | 6 | 1.5 hours to hour and 45 min |
| 2 | 31–45 minutes | 7 | hour and 46 min to 2 hours |
| 3 | 46–60 minutes | 8 | 2 hours to 2 hours and 15 min |
| 4 | hour to hour and 15 min | 9 | longer than 2 hours and 15 min |

117. On the average, how long do you watch TV each day?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0–15 minutes | 5 | hour and 16 min to 1.5 hours |
| 1 | 16–30 minutes | 6 | 1.5 hours to hour and 45 min |
| 2 | 31–45 minutes | 7 | hour and 46 min to 2 hours |
| 3 | 46–60 minutes | 8 | 2 hours to 2 hours and 15 min |
| 4 | hour to hour and 15 min | 9 | longer than 2 hours and 15 min |

**Appendix B**

117. In the average week, how long do you watch American and British TV programs in English?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0–30 minutes per week | 5 | 2.5–3 hours per week |
| 1 | 0.5–1 hour per week | 6 | 3–3.5 hours per week |
| 2 | 1–1.5 hours per week | 7 | 3.5–4 hours per week |
| 3 | 1.5–2 hours per week | 8 | 4–4.5 hours per week |
| 4 | 2–2.5 hours per week | 9 | longer than 4.5 hours per week |